

## THE CHILD IS THE FATHER IS THE CHILD . . .

I sit in a chair made for five year olds  
and talk to the kindergarten teacher.  
She has a soft voice and kind eyes.  
Gentle hands hold the information sheet  
I have filled out for my youngest son.  
I have answered questions about his  
background, medical history, likes and  
dislikes. Where it asked what I wanted  
him to learn I answered,

"That the world is a wasteland  
and that each individual is on a quest  
and that it is only through the recognition  
of myth that truth and beauty will be  
discovered."

She laughs softly and suggests that  
perhaps that is best taught at home.  
I too softly laugh but I want to say  
that my wife has left me and taken up  
with another man. That at 37 I am  
locked into a dead-end job and that  
despair hangs on me like black oil.  
That my children cry at night yet  
my arms hang at my side, that my eyes  
are cast down. That I want her to  
close her arms about me and say,  
"Hush, child, Daddy will be here  
soon."

## THE GARDEN

The driveway hasn't been swept  
in months and the lawn grass  
is overgrown.  
In the windowboxes I built  
the wild flowers droop  
as if in mourning.

They only need water.



I've returned home to care  
for the house  
while my ex and my children  
are on vacation.  
The key in the lock clicks and  
I step in. It is very strange  
as if time is emulsified. Pictures  
still hang on the wall, the couch  
against the wall, the bookcase  
silent. I move amid the silence  
looking for clues.

There are no new snapshots  
on the fridge. Her panties  
in the laundry are not torn  
by fresh, hot hands.  
The dishes from the last meal  
are stacked in the drying rack.  
I step onto the back porch  
to smoke a cigarette and look  
at the garden I planted  
for the family last spring.

It is uncared for.

Weeds shoot up  
and fruit, ripe and heavy on the vine,  
lies fallen, twisted,  
rotting with disinterest.  
Too much. Too much growth  
unchecked. Too much color,  
vitality and the past.

I snuff the smoke.

Inside I pour a glass of red wine  
from a bottle on the kitchen counter.  
In her bedroom I find  
a vase filled with a bouquet  
of roses that I could have never  
sent, could have never grown.

I leave the key under the mat.

—Jeff Parsons

Surrey, British Columbia